

Capital Report

October 6, 2017

Nearly a month after Hurricane Irma washed eight-to-ten feet of storm surge onto Everglades City in Southern Collier County, residents with damaged, unlivable homes are still waiting on emergency temporary housing. City officials estimate about a hundred homes in the area are uninhabitable due to flood damage and mold. But officials say they expect relief within a week. From member station WGCU, Jessica Meszaros takes us to Everglades City.

For weeks, people living in the U.S. commonwealth of Puerto Rico have been struggling with a lack of food, gasoline and electricity. Now the American mainland is expecting an influx of people from the devastated island. Florida Governor Rick Scott declared a state of emergency in order to receive aid to help accommodate those people. From member station WGCU in Fort Myers, Quincy Walters spoke with a family who just arrived from Puerto Rico this week.

The relocation of Puerto Rican residents to Florida could cause a seismic political shift, at least in some parts of the Sunshine State. Kate Payne reports many may settle in Florida's purple counties ahead of the 2018 elections.

The medical marijuana company Surterra is urging state health regulators to take steps to allow edible cannabis treatments. But Nick Evans reports the roll out for those rules could still be far off on the horizon.

As Florida continues to work to combat human trafficking, some experts say working to make sure everyone recognizes the signs is important. But, equally important is going after the so-called "johns" themselves. Sascha Cordner reports.

Transportation experts are pushing for a better plan in Florida for getting people with disabilities where they need to go. Regan McCarthy reports a newly created taskforce is taking on the issue. (28:58)

October 13, 2017

Substance abuse experts and law enforcement officers are calling on lawmakers to bolster access to treatment for people battling opioid addiction. Nick Evans reports the biggest focus is on medication-assisted treatments.

Florida's beaches are in constant need of restoration, to truck in sand that the sea washes away. In the wake of Hurricane Irma, miles of critically eroded beaches are in even more danger. Kate Payne reports a powerful lawmaker is once again trying to get funding to replenish the shorelines.

The Miami Herald has spent the last two years looking into systemic abuse with the department that's intended to rehabilitate kids who get into trouble. The investigation into the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice – which was released this week – is called "Fight Club." The Miami Herald's Marbin Miller reports on what they found.

Florida lawmakers are expected to soon take a deeper look into the Miami Herald investigative series, which detailed abuses within the state's juvenile facilities. This was Committee Week in Tallahassee. And, as Sascha

Cordner reports, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Criminal and Civil Justice gave the head of the Florida's juvenile justice system a preview of what's likely to come.

As Florida lawmakers work to curb texting while driving, one representative is turning to local governments for help. Regan McCarthy has more... (28:57)

October 20, 2017

More than a dozen school districts are now challenging that part of a law that requires them to share their school construction money with charter schools. But as Lynn Hatter reports, some of those same districts are also getting a portion of the extra funding the new law provides.

After Hurricane Irma hit Florida last month, many schools were out for days and even longer than that in the Keys. That also meant pre-schools, including child care centers that serve newborn babies and toddlers, were also closed. From member station WLRN in Miami, Nadege (nuh-DEGE) Green tells us the economic toll on preschools after a storm affects families and the people who take care of their children.

After spiking last year, worker's compensation rates in Florida are set to decline. But Nick Evans reports some labor organizations contend the decrease doesn't go far enough.

You haven't done anything wrong, but you're pulled over anyway. The law enforcement officer asks to search your car. Should that officer be required to tell you about your right to decline the search? As Sascha Cordner reports, Florida lawmakers have started discussions about that very topic for the 2018 legislative session.

Tim Padgett traveled from Florida to Guayama in Puerto Rico's hard hit southeast to find out how residents there are handling storm recovery.

As more electric vehicles begin showing up on Florida's streets, the state's utilities and utility regulators are looking into what impact the cars could have on in the state's electric infrastructure. Regan McCarthy has more...

Florida's coastlines and cavern systems are dotted with historic sites, from World War II era shipwrecks, to Spanish galleons, to remnants of thousand year old civilizations. But there aren't enough archaeologists to keep up with the underwater preservation. Kate Payne reports now the state is training amateur scuba divers to pick up some of the slack. (28:58)

October 27, 2017

Florida lawmakers are grappling with where one person's rights end and another's begin as debates over a texting while driving bill turn emotional. Regan McCarthy has more....

Late Friday (10/27) afternoon, Senator Jeff Clemons who was prominently featured in the preceding story by Regan McCarthy announced his resignation from the Florida Senate. This followed revelations of his affair with a Tallahassee lobbyist.

Florida health officials are under fire for the slow roll-out of new medical marijuana licenses. Nick Evans reports state lawmakers are rejecting the department's excuses.

The U.S. State Department considers child marriage a human rights abuse. Still, the practice continues not just in faraway places, but in the state of Florida. Kate Payne reports a coalition is walking the halls of the state capitol to change that.

In the coming weeks, the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice will be putting the finishing touches on a newly created office where juveniles and their families can raise concerns. As Sascha Cordner reports, that's just one of the reforms the head of DJJ recently told a group of lawmakers, who had some suggestions of their own to address abuses within the system outlined in a Miami Herald investigative series.

After years of poor student academic performance, a crumbling infrastructure and budget deficit, North Florida's Jefferson County School system became the state's first charter school district this year. Today, it has fewer than a thousand students and all attend a consolidated K through 12 school run by Somerset Academy, a charter school network. Florida Public Radio's Lynn Hatter sat down with Jefferson Superintendent Marianne Arbulu to talk about the future of Jefferson, what happened and what's left to do.

That was Florida Public Radio's Lynn Hatter speaker with Jefferson County School Superintendent Marianne Arbulu. (28:58)

November 3, 2017

Local government leaders and members of the Florida House appear to be drawing their battle lines for the upcoming legislative session. Regan McCarthy has more....

The governor and state lawmakers are proposing new prescription limits to fight opioid abuse. But they also want to require physicians use a long-standing drug monitoring database—raising the question, why wasn't it mandatory to begin with? Nick Evans has more.

With the 2018 legislative session around the corner, Florida lawmakers as well as child welfare stakeholders are starting to dive into how to address the huge turnover of the state's child protective investigators. As Sascha Cordner reports, their job is to look into cases called into the state's child abuse hotline.

Universities in South Florida are working to help Puerto Ricans affected by Hurricane Maria to continue their education. Some students have already taken advantage of discounts and other incentives. But as we hear from Jessica Bateman at member station WLRN in Miami, some students are going through a rough transition. (28:58)

November 10, 2017

Allegations of sexual harassment in Florida's capitol are roiling the state legislature just as the lawmaking session is set to begin. Nick Evans reports the flying accusations are putting other elected officials in an uncomfortable position.

The headlines have been full lately of stories about current and former government officials fighting accusations of poor behavior while in office. Some are facing investigations; others are facing time in jail. Now Regan McCarthy reports one committee is considering a number of new rules intended to help elected officials stay in line.

Florida State University Greek fraternities and sororities are on indefinite suspension following the recent death of a pledge. Lynn Hatter reports FSU President John Thrasher is defending the decision, but not everyone is convinced he made the right call.

A revived bill that wades into the abortion debate has passed its first Florida Senate Committee, but not without opposition. Sascha Cordner reports.

Florida lawmakers and Governor Scott are \$50 million apart when it comes to funding the state's signature land buying program. But whether it's 50 million or 100 million, the state has backed out of such proposals before, zeroing out funding for Florida Forever three years in a row. Meanwhile, Kate Payne reports millions of acres of land are at risk of development. (29:02)

November 17, 2017

Automation. Development. Citrus greening. Florida's agriculture industry is hurting and Hurricane Irma was only the most recent blow. Kate Payne reports lawmakers will be considering how to support the industry – second only to tourism – during the upcoming lawmaking session.

Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush is heaping praise on state Republican leaders for approving a controversial education law now heading to the courts. Lynn Hatter reports Bush calls House Bill 7069 a bold move amid slumping state educational progress.

The Florida Legislature is poised to make good on a 2016 decision to replace one of its entries in Washington D.C.'s statuary hall. Nick Evans reports Mary McLeod Bethune seems likely to get the nod.

After years of failed attempts to expand Medicaid insurance coverage in Florida, one recently formed group is pushing for something more -- single payer. Normally that means complete government control of health insurance. But as we hear from Ryan Benk at member station WJCT in Jacksonville, the drive for a package of constitutional amendments is focusing on a strategy that keeps private insurance intact.

Florida lawmakers are trying once against to stop greyhound racing in Florida. Regan McCarthy has more.

With the third largest inmate population in the U-S, the Florida Department of Corrections is continuing to look for ways to get that number to decrease—even as it's started declining in recent years. As Sascha Cordner reports, state lawmakers may be coming together on a solution that used to be controversial in the past.

States are competitive whether they're vying to keep their military bases or to attract new corporate headquarters. And now, there's a new tug of war – this time over military retirees who come with pensions, health care and are a proven workforce. Florida is already known as a "retiree mecca" - but the state is adding veteran specific programs to entice even more military retirees. Bobbie O'Brien reports from St. Petersburg. (28:59)

November 24, 2017

A bipartisan group of Florida legislators is making noise about criminal justice reform ahead of the 2018 session. Nick Evans reports the group wants to lift the felony threshold for certain crimes, and give judges more flexibility in sentencing.

Lawmakers are considering a move that could limit the ability of local governments to make rules about where powerlines should go. Regan McCarthy has more.

This month is Diabetes Awareness Month and a bipartisan push is underway to do more to treat the disease that's among the leading causes of death for Floridians. Sascha Cordner prepared this report.

The impacts of hurricanes on people are well documented, and can scar communities for years. But the ecological effects of storms aren't as obvious. Kate Payne brings us this report as we approach the end of the 2017 hurricane season.

A new report says Florida is leading the nation in solar permits for homes. This comes after years of the "Sunshine State" languishing behind northern places like New Jersey. WUSF's Steve Newborn looks at why residential solar power is finally taking off in Florida—as well as two new co-ops being formed to take advantage of the power of group buying.

Finally tonight: Satellite images this month show a Red Tide—a harmful algal bloom festering in the Gulf of Mexico mere miles away from the shorelines of Southwest Florida. But as WGPU's Quincy Walters reports, birds have been sounding the alarm for weeks. (29:02)

December 1, 2017

The 2017 Hurricane season is officially over. But lawmakers are still debating how to pick up the pieces, Kate Payne reports on where they're focusing their efforts.

Florida voters could be asked to reconsider a ban on public funding for religious organizations. Lynn Hatter reports the language has its roots in the late 1800's during a wave of new immigrants to the United States.

A proposal changing the eligibility requirements for becoming a judge in a state or county court is starting to move in a committee of the Constitution Revision Commission. As Sascha Cordner reports, that's the panel that meets every 20 years to revise the state constitution and put the matter before voters.

While animal rights activists argue greyhound racing has no place in Florida today Regan McCarthy reports other argue a ban on the practice has no place in the state's constitution.

Just over eight percent of Americans who have vision trouble do not have vision insurance. And half of those who have the option to buy vision insurance don't. From Health News Florida, Daylina (day-LEE-nuh) Miller talked to some Tampa Bay area residents who wear eyeglasses and think vision insurance isn't worth the cost.

Tom Flanigan reports on a new book by a former Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) inspector on how to prepare for and respond to storm flooding. (28:58)

December 8, 2017

Clearwater Republican Senator Jack Latvala continues to fight against allegations of sexual harassment but there's mounting evidence he is on the losing end. Lynn Hatter reports the state's House Speaker said recently Latvala could end up being kicked out the chamber in January.

First responders run towards crashes, emergencies and catastrophes, not away from them. And for some, their experiences are leading to post traumatic stress disorder. But in Florida, first responders who develop PTSD on the job don't get compensated, unless they have a physical injury as well. Kate Payne reports on efforts to change that. A note to listeners, this story includes frank talk of death and suicide.

The official start to the 2018 legislative session is about a month away, and already, some high profile gun bills appear to be dead. As Sascha Cordner reports, discussion surrounding the proposals not only pit Republicans against one another, it's led to sparring between gun rights groups as well.

A new Florida law allows any state resident to challenge what's being taught in public schools. A handful of complaints have been filed in school districts statewide since the law took effect in July. Cathy Carter with member station WUSF in Tampa spoke with Renalia (ren-NAIL-ee-uh) DuBose (duh-BOZE), a professor at W-M-U Cooley Law School in Tampa about what the new Florida textbook challenge law is all about.

When the 2018 lawmaking session begins in January, Florida lawmakers will again wrestle with who we honor and how we memorialize them. Nick Evans reports one measure would establish a monument—another would remove one. (28:58)

December 15, 2017

With the 2018 legislative session looming, state officials are doing their level best to defuse a widening sexual harassment scandal. Nick Evans reports the governor is ordering new training at state agencies.

Outstanding prison lawsuits will mean less money to spend on Florida Department of Corrections' priorities. That's the message from the new Florida Senate Budget chair. Sascha Cordner reports.

As the opioid epidemic swells the time of abused and neglected children coming into the state foster-care system, a Florida judge is trying to find them a forever home for the holidays. Tom Flanigan has more.

Florida voters could be asked to ban oil drilling off Florida's coasts. The proposal got the green-light Thursday before a Constitution Revision Commission Panel with little opposition.

The number of Floridians living in what's considered unaffordable housing is growing. That's according to information from the University of Florida's Shimer Center for Housing Studies. Now Regan McCarthy reports a group of lawmakers is pushing a bill to change how the state's affordable housing funds are spent.

The Florida Supreme Court has tossed out a case challenging the governor's right to make last minute appointments. The justices decided it's too soon to review because the appointments haven't been made yet. Kate Payne reports without a clear ruling, some are worried about a potential constitutional crisis.

More than half a million motorcycles and mopeds are registered in the state of Florida. They're a common vehicle for college students. They're relatively inexpensive and an easy way to get around town. But some are questioning if they are safe. (28:58)

December 22, 2017

A powerful Florida Senator who is also vying to be the GOP candidate for governor has been toppled over accusations of public corruption and sexual harassment. Lynn Hatter has the latest.

A state government agency charged with helping investigate sexual harassment complaints may not have the necessary resources if there's a significant increase in the number of those complaints. Tom Flanigan has more.

Opioid abuse may grab the headlines, but drug-related deaths overall are on the rise. And when it comes to helping people kick their addiction, Nick Evans reports one lawmaker believes Florida is rejecting some of the best people for the job.

Fighting contraband has been an ongoing issue within the state's prison system. As Sascha Cordner reports, Florida's prison chief is exploring some innovative ideas to address that issue.

Florida lawmakers are once again trying to reform the state's food stamp program, which has more than doubled since the Recession. But unlike in previous years, the Republican-led effort could be making some inroads with Democrats. Kate Payne reports.

Florida universities don't always have the resources to help students with mental illnesses. Addressing those matters is a serious problem faced by institutions of higher learning. They're expected to play a big role in identifying symptoms and helping individuals get better. Florida Public Radio's Victoria Weler spoke to a student who feels her school offered help during a difficult time.

Florida's wildlife officials say protecting the state's flora and fauna requires buy-in from more than just the traditional anglers and sportsmen. Now Regan McCarthy reports the state conservation commission is working to cast a wider net. (29:02)

December 29, 2017

One of the biggest stories of the year has been the increasing number of people, mostly men that have lost positions of power due to sexual harassment. And the issue has hit politics particularly hard—from state houses to the halls of Congress. When the Florida legislature convenes in January, the specter surrounding one powerful lawmaker threatens to overtake the business of making laws for the state. Lynn Hatter reports on Clearwater Republican Senator Jack Latvala continued fight against allegations of sexual harassment and the mounting evidence he is on the losing end.

Lynn Hatter and Tom Flanigan discuss last week's decision by Senator Jack Latvala to leave the Legislature in the wake of those sexual harassment allegations.

Local government leaders and members of the Florida House appear to be drawing their battle lines for the upcoming legislative session. Regan McCarthy has more....

Regan McCarthy discusses the growing pushback from Florida's local governments over what they perceive to be legislative overreach.

In the latter part of this year, a lot has happened surrounding Florida's Juvenile Justice system. A Miami Herald six-part investigative "Fight Club" series detailed abuses within the state's juvenile facilities. In the run up to the 2018 legislative session, Florida lawmakers have been questioning the head of DJJ Christy Daly as well. And, more questions could follow when the session starts in January. For now, Sascha Cordner takes a look back at what issues the Secretary and lawmakers are hoping to address.

Sascha Cordner looks ahead to what may happen in regards juvenile justice reform during the 2018 Session.

In November the Trump Administration ended the temporary protective status of Haitian immigrants. The program means tens of thousands of Haitians who fled the 2010 earthquake could soon be at risk of deportation. We're looking back at Kate Payne's visit to a Haitian church in North Florida to see how the community is reacting.

Kate Payne talks about how the end of special protections for Haitian emigres may play out in 2018.

In July, scientists released a dozen eastern indigo snakes in North Florida after they had been absent from the landscape for decades. Nick Evans was there for the reintroduction and earlier this month he went back to get an update on how the project is going. (29:02)